

**FRESNO, CA** - Today, Congressman Jim Costa (CA-20) led a bipartisan effort to help retain the only permanently stationed Air National Guard fighter unit in California. The air base is the 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, headquartered in Fresno.

Congressman Costa sent a letter to Secretary Rumsfeld stressing the necessary and important role the 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing plays not only in the Valley, but also in California. Costa's letter was also signed by Valley Congressmen Devin Nunes (CA-21) and George Radanovich (CA-19).

The text of the letter follows.

Dear Secretary Rumsfeld:

We are writing to urge that the 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing stationed at the City of Fresno airport not be included in the 2005 round of Base Realignment and Closure ("BRAC").

The 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing is a key component of California's homeland defense. The 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing is the only permanently stationed Air National Guard fighter unit in California. It maintains 18 F16 aircraft, and three F16s are on constant alert to provide immediate homeland defense of California.

Effective and timely defense of California requires stationing these aircraft in a centrally located area like Fresno. These interceptors can reach key portions of California within minutes, providing the people of California homeland defense, air coverage and protection. We believe that moving the 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing would jeopardize the homeland security interests of our constituents and the people of California.

Removal of the 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing would also have a devastating effect on the Central

Valley. As you know, President Bush issued Executive Order 13173 to create an Interagency Task Force on the Economic Development of the Central San Joaquin Valley. The Task Force was chartered to coordinate federal agencies and resources to advance the economic development of the Central San Joaquin Valley. As an appointed member of that Task Force, you can appreciate the economic problems that this area already faces, as the City of Fresno and its airport qualify both as Federal Empowerment Zones and California Enterprise Zones. The Central Valley receives \$1900 less per capita than the rest of the United States in federal tax dollars returned to local communities. In 2003, 21.8 percent of the citizens in Fresno County lived below the poverty level.

The 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing provides local economy with 375 full-time jobs and 627 part-time Air National Guard jobs. Its presence contributes at least \$28 million dollars in direct and indirect economic value to the Fresno region. This figure is based primarily on payroll and does not include the sizable economic value of what the Wing purchases in the local community. Loss of this Wing would be a critical blow to our region.

The Central Valley is probably the ideal location for reservists in the California Air National Guard. Reservists can afford to live in the Central Valley while they cannot afford to live in many other areas of California. The local Wing commander estimates that 85% of his reservists live within 30 minutes of Fresno. Moving the 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing would likely result, we understand, in the loss of 30% of the reservists in the unit, a terrible blow for a unit providing active Homeland Security.

As you know, many National Guard units are facing shortfalls in recruitment. We understand that the 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing is currently leading the entire state of California in National Guard recruitment, in part because of the very favorable attitude of the people in the Fresno area toward military service. Removing the 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing from Fresno would likely harm future retention rates for the unit.

In addition, the 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing has developed joint training missions with Naval and Army aircraft located nearby. Loss of the Wing from Fresno would undermine that ongoing joint training.

Please note that the Fresno airport complex also has other multi-service units operating on site, such as the 1106th Aviation Classification Repair Activity Depot (AVCRAD), 185th Quartermaster Unit (185th QM Unit), and the 40th Aviation Brigade. The arguments to protect

the 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing apply similarly with each of these facilities. Their loss would approximately double the economic impact on the local community of losing the 144<sup>th</sup> Air Wing alone.

Finally, we are told that the Air Force has invested nearly \$50 million in fixed facilities at the Fresno Airport for the 144<sup>th</sup> Wing. If relocated, these facilities and investments will be wasted, and the Department will likely incur additional construction costs associated with new or refurbished facilities elsewhere. In fact, the Department of Defense's annual cost in payments to the city for the lease of the Wing property at the Fresno airport is only \$56,868 annually.

This low lease obligation, as compared with the potential relocation costs of tens of millions of dollars, further underlines the conclusion that Fresno is an ideal location for California's only permanent Air National Guard fighter wing.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Congressman Jim Costa

Congressman Devin Nunes

Congressman George Radanovich